

BOY

By

David Kyle Miller

Submitted to the graduate degree program in Visual Arts and the Graduate Faculty of the University of Kansas in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

---

Chairperson Jon Keith Swindell

---

John Hachmeister

---

Matthew Burke

---

Jon Havener

Date Defended: 04/03/2013

The Thesis Committee for David Kyle Miller  
certifies that this is the approved version of the following Thesis:

BOY

---

Chairperson Jon Keith Swindell

Date approved: 04/22/2013

The conception and production of *BOY* as a thesis exhibition is a personal genesis. “Who am I” “Why have I become what I am? “, are the questions I asked myself upon embarking in the creation of *BOY*. By projecting once repressed, now active memories through a self-styled, provisional philosophical lens, I seek to gain an understanding of myself. This body of work serves as the interpretive evidence of that projection and forms a base from which to construct a series of realizations that aid in the development of an accepted identity. Thus, my sculptural investigations function as an exercise in self-actualization and realization.

By applying the above thesis, I have begun to recognize and value elements in the works that arose as a result of my investigation. Symbolic representations of the dichotomous relationship between religiosity and sexuality constitute my personal narrative – the artist’s voice – because they represent a conscious, intentional development and understanding of me.

As I approach an explanation and definition of the sculptures in the thesis exhibition *BOY*, it is important to state that they exist as a collective. Although each piece stands as a representation of an individual recalled event, the true impact of the works lay in their spatial proximity. This proximity represents paradox. Paradox is important because it is the thread that ties the work together.

Although separate in chronological sequence, the memories that stimulated a response to create and to find unity in my ideological framework supersede the constraints of the physical production of the work. This manifesto is integral to the work not only as a cohesive device but also as the lens through which now active memories are projected. It is something I created and is now alive in me. In this, it is essential to allow this compilation of thought to exist textually as a unit. The manifesto reads as follows,

“Socialized value systems are in direct opposition to salable sexuality.

This, in accordance, produces a personal and philosophical dilemma that presents a paradox and conflicting relationship between socialized religious values and stylized hyper-sexuality. It is a blending of oppressive social constructs with merchandisable constructions of innate desire. These indoctrinated and socialized moral and ethical mechanisms correspondingly impose similar oppressive and repressive functions. The homogenization of the organizational structures serves as a means of control or re-directive stimulation. This becomes an ethically and economically justified means of authority, setting up both very formal and inadvertent methods of control. These inspired neuroses correspond to tension, anxiety, increased guilt, hypocrisy, and reduced sexual pleasure. As we consume these prescriptive social medicines our perception of sexuality and what is

considered proper within the realm of anathematized sexual activity becomes quotidian. This in turn creates divisions within the field of marketable sexuality, compartmentalizing and sectioning domains and acts of eroticism in an effort to present variable forms of sexual activity as either domestic or taboo. These demarcations perform the task of sexually stylizing the commodified object and enact disciplinary regimes upon the performance of one's own sexuality thus defining women or men as a distinct group ascribed with clearly assigned common characteristics. The cultural projection of hyper-sexuality and dominant themes of masculinity and femininity define sexuality through the depictions presented in pornography and domestic advertising. We are presented with governing notions of what it is to be male or female. As this material maintains its ability to flex and shift to perpetually evolving markets, we become sleepers to our own diluted sexuality and the expression of these intimate responses in exchange for a vendible and marketed ideal of hyper/hypo sexuality. Persistently mutating sexual archetypes are ultimately established within the cultural mythos then projected onto the persons targeted for marketability. It is important to recognize this projection as a device from which to reflect, then to impose and reflect a personally perceived judgment of the socially refined. I find this a necessary exercise in identity formation and a progressive attitude towards self-reference. Western philosophy and religion considers this narcissistic and self-righteous, however, I understand it as a necessary endeavor to escape the egoless constraints of a neo capitalist age.

As we move through the sociopolitical structure produced by the constraints of late capitalism, we find ourselves unnaturally incapacitated by the imposition and instillation of the schizoid experience. As Jameson states in his essay *Postmodernism and Consumer Society*, ‘schizophrenic experience is an experience of isolated, disconnected, discontinuous material signifiers which fail to link up into a coherent sequence. The schizophrenic thus does not know personal identity in our sense, since our feeling of identity depends on our sense of the persistence of the ‘I’ and the ‘me’ over time (119)’. Additionally, this confusing adulteration identifies a need for a marketable stylized sexuality. This is the result of an economic standard calling for a market growth that demonstrates the destructive and devastating effects of a widespread commodification that has permeated all domains of intimate life. This age is defined by an intensely rapid personal and cultural homogenization formed by the array of disconnected signifiers to which we are exposed. This lack of temporal continuity promotes an accelerated subjective identity assumption.”

Dividing the exhibition into four distinct pieces logically defines this framework and how it relates to the work. The first piece addressed asserts a focus on the salability of the human body and the projection of archetypal figures within one’s personal mythos onto the commodified ideal. This exercise employs application of self reference to the cultural mythos by grafting or projecting onto a preexisting archetype then reflecting it back into a venue of salability. This is an objectification and reification of my own mythology extracted from the social or cultural mythos.

In the production of *Venus Deconstructed* I define the archetypal Venus as an iconic symbolic representation of sexuality, a culturally idealized symbol and representation of this salable sexuality. In this work, Venus arrives in the form of provocatively proportioned sex shop mannequin. Dismantlement and fragmentation of the “Venus” become a form of disempowerment and subsequently, she is stripped of her authority through a process of vacuum forming the fragmented components. Central to the work is the appropriation and positioning of this glorified figure as a commodified object on which to graft personally desirable modifications. This hybridization of the figure becomes a poly-amorphic sexual amalgam, representative of a break from homogenized economic and sexual determinism defined by the terms of hegemonic masculinity or femininity. By maintaining a delicate balance of stylization and realism, deforming attitudes about sexuality produce an almost surrealistic graphic depiction of sexuality. Moving away from any hyper-realistic treatment of the figure, these symbolic fragments become grotesque caricatures of the cultural consummate. Considering the explicit subject matter, stylizing the sexualized is integral to producing components that exhibit a failure to shock thus allowing them a digestible position within the discontinuous array of postmodern signifiers. Characterizing the figure with a more illustrative quality, the objects are allowed to perform a role via viewer projection, unconsciously acting out a meta-fictional script prescribed in the viewer’s mind. This performance, in turn, perpetuates a binary view of sexuality and gender relations. Essentially, process dictates an understanding of the culturally defined mythos of the chosen archetype, systematically disempowering the cultural myth through self reference, thus stripping the personal myth of its acquired authority through fragmentation and disembodiment. Venus deconstructed represents a palpable simulacra of a comparatively maladapted, grafted sexuality and an individually interpreted reification of the culturally

projected. Offered is a personally reflective cast of sexually stylized figuration and a method of understanding the mechanisms at work thus gaining control over what is presented.

In demonstration of this conflicting relationship, *Tidy Boy (Emotional Diversion and Deviative Detourants)* arrived as part of an exercise in self actualization and realization. Defining action relies heavily upon understanding one's causal underlying mechanisms that in effect trigger potentially destructive and oppressive behavior. These religion based constructs, in certain instances, stifle one's ability in accepting and understanding one's sexuality. Additionally, even upon observing and examining religion objectively within its social and cultural context, deriving its social function as an organizational structure, these belief systems routinely conflict with our exposure to media. For this particular work, an introspective approach has been taken in discovering the result of indoctrinated and socialized moral and ethical constructs. Again applying the use of a mannequin, the child's figure was dismantled and reconfigured into his suggested prayer pose. This pose is significant in representing the religious connotations that the work conveys. Set center of an 8' pink and gold target, *Tidy Boy* finds himself floating and confined by his golden stockade. Although provided elevated status, he remains a target in constraints; static, in an imposed position. Off of the wall he is suspended above a familial triad of vacuum formed garments, the symbols of oppression. This golden garb, the ritualistic uniform of any red blooded American, appears in the chroma of the idol set contrastingly to the typically feminized, sexualized, and fittingly titled "Sexy Pink". Although deprived of their despotic status, *Tidy Boy*, stripped of all senses, continues his institutional reverence. No matter the degree of rationality one attains, the residue of these systems remain with lasting effect.

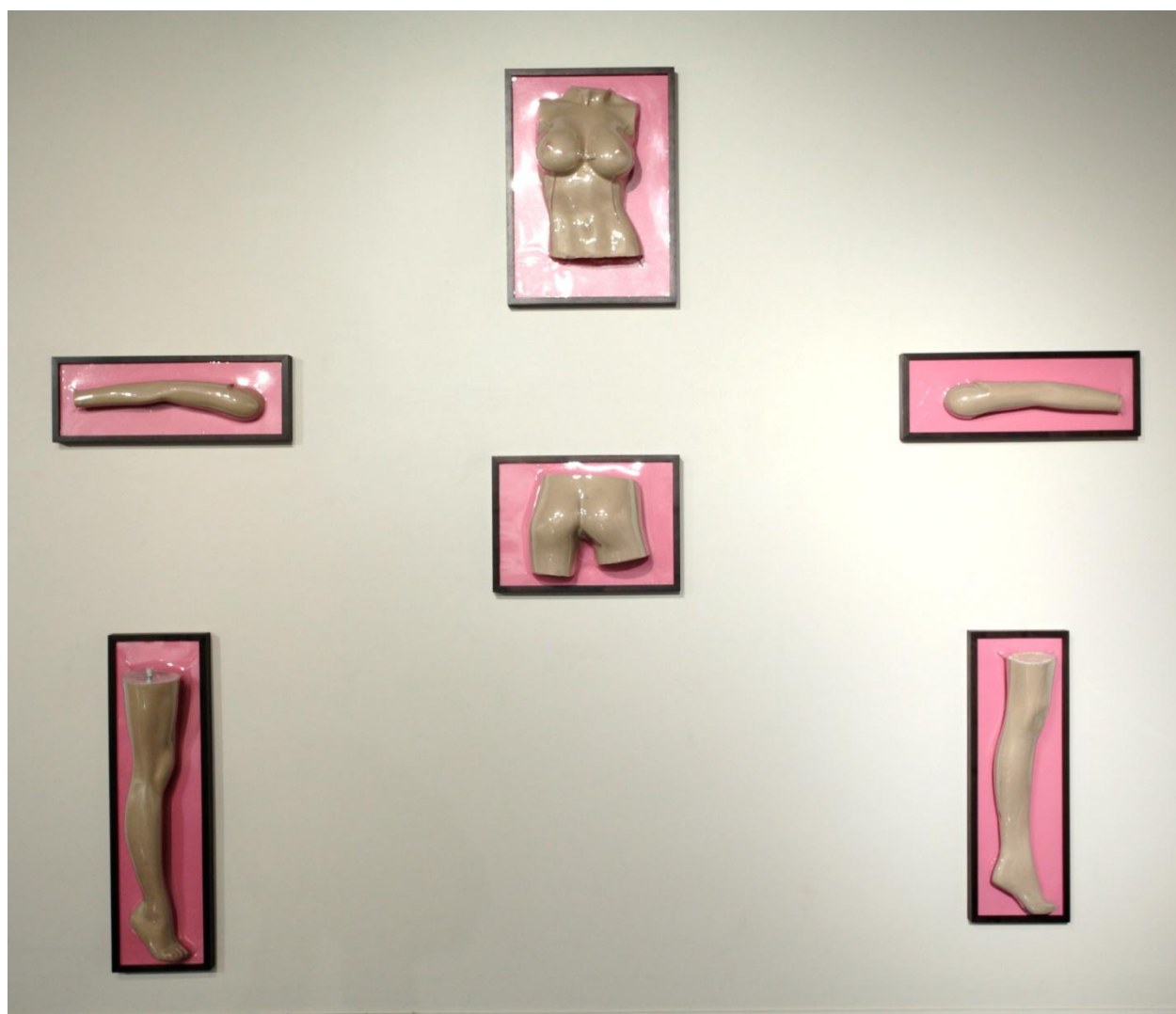


*XY Triptych* illustrates a less general more memory focused representation of the ideas that are set forth in the body of this paper. Where we find *Venus Deconstructed* and *Tidy Boy* as more thematic central figures, *XY Triptych*, although integral, becomes peripheral, hence its placement in the gallery. *XY* represents a residue of this moral conflict and the direct effect that this dilemma can have on interpersonal relations and the stratified gender role one performs in participation. Similarly to *Tidy Boy*, a cast of the artist's head is placed center of smaller pink and gold targets. In full makeup, one wonders the gender of this elevated yet targeted bust. Given one indicator of gender yet stripped of another, we find bonded golden hair applied as a link between figurative elements, a symbolic and formal tool implemented as an x-axis guide. Below, the y-axis indicator; an enlarged, highly stylized tongue performs an implied flaccidity. Attached to the tongue is a golden rope fixed opposite to a breast idol. What follows on the Y axis are two additional panels representing an implied movement of the tongue. The tongues lift, however, the attached breasts remain static. This mammalian stasis and the movements in the two panels that follow, demonstrate a false sense of empowerment that one may feel when subscribing to socially constructed gender roles.

Similarly to *XY Triptych*, "*Whose Hose are those and why do you Tuck?*" expresses a memory of greater distillation filtered through the previously outlined ideology. Again, somewhat tangential in location, *Whose Hose are those* is placed across from *XY* in a spatial dialogue. Where *XY* represents a residue of this moral conflict and the direct effect that this dilemma can have on interpersonal relations and the stratified gender role one performs, *Whose Hose are those* illustrates the root of this conflict, the cause for the effect offered in *XY*. A series of tape-casts, covered in resin-bonded pantyhose and suspended from the ceiling, *Whose Hose are those* finds a meaningful atonement for a, until recently, long repressed childhood memory. Taken from the Venus figure, the lower torso casts symbolize an archetypal ideal and an

embodiment of femininity. Grafted onto these casts are penises meant to alter this representation and demonstrate my adult desire to reconcile this memory. Alternating from the suspended figures in space are the same penises, taken from the same mold rather, framed and set against a pink background. The male genitalia, enclosed and fastened to the wall, express masculinity and confinement. The interplay between the objects repeated on the wall and in space represent linearly, the changing chronological feeling between empowerment and societal constraint. This response is an effort to understand my actions as a child and young adult not as deviant but as relatively natural.

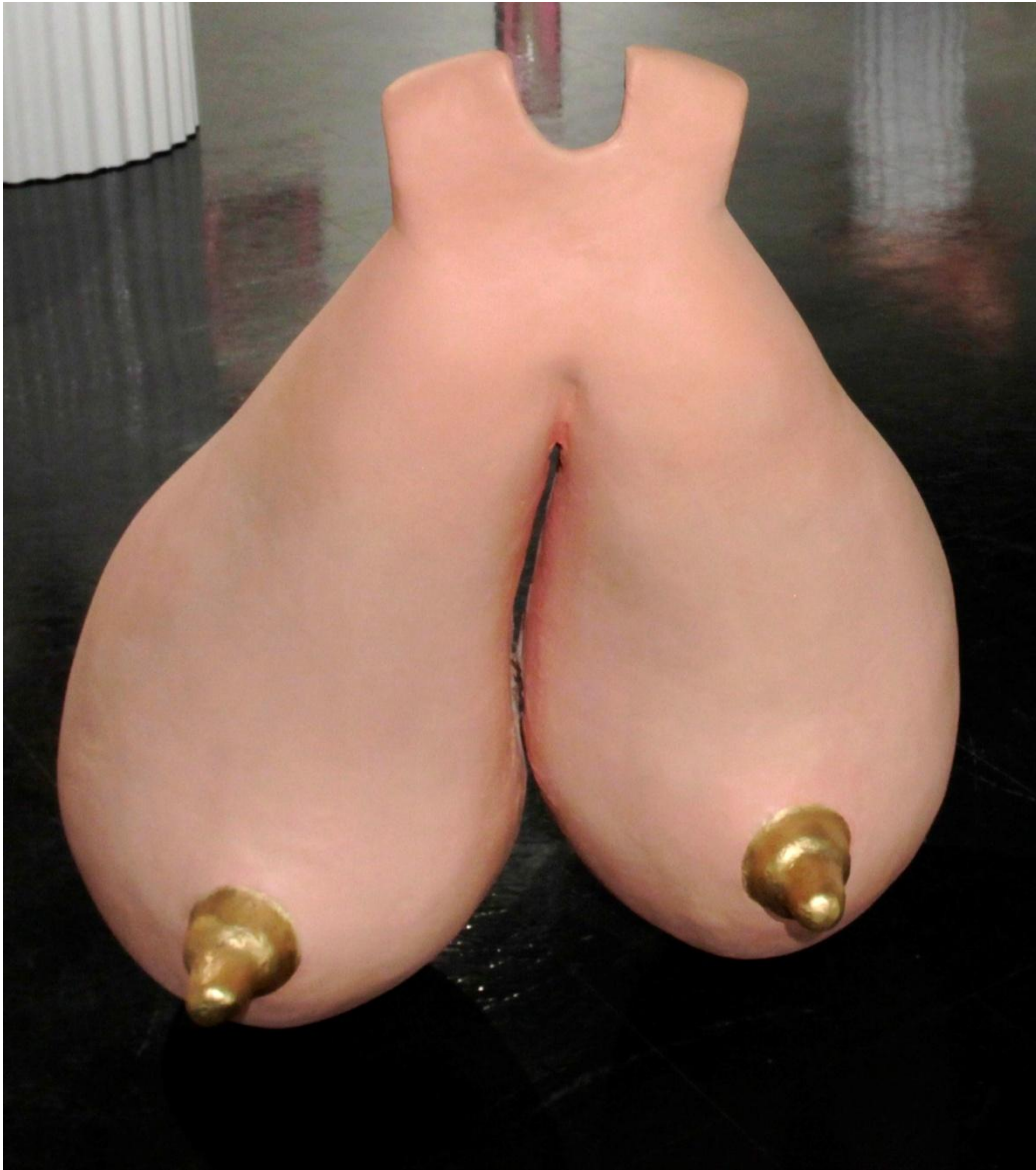
In *BOY* idiosyncratic anecdotes are embodied in the cryptic, figurative constructs presented in the thesis exhibition. These compositions undergo a process of re-collective re-assembly. Furthermore, the works retrospectively perform the task of mythologizing significant events, people, and places in my attempt to organize, resolve, and atone for the existence of the memories that provoked their creation. The symbolic stylization, exaggeration, idealization, and fragmentation of figurative components express a reconciliation of these memories and serve as regulative mechanism for their inherent state of dis-junction.



**Vacuum Formed Fragments**



**Venus Head Grafting**



**Venus Breast Grafting**



**Venus Hand Grafting**



**Venus Genital Grafting**



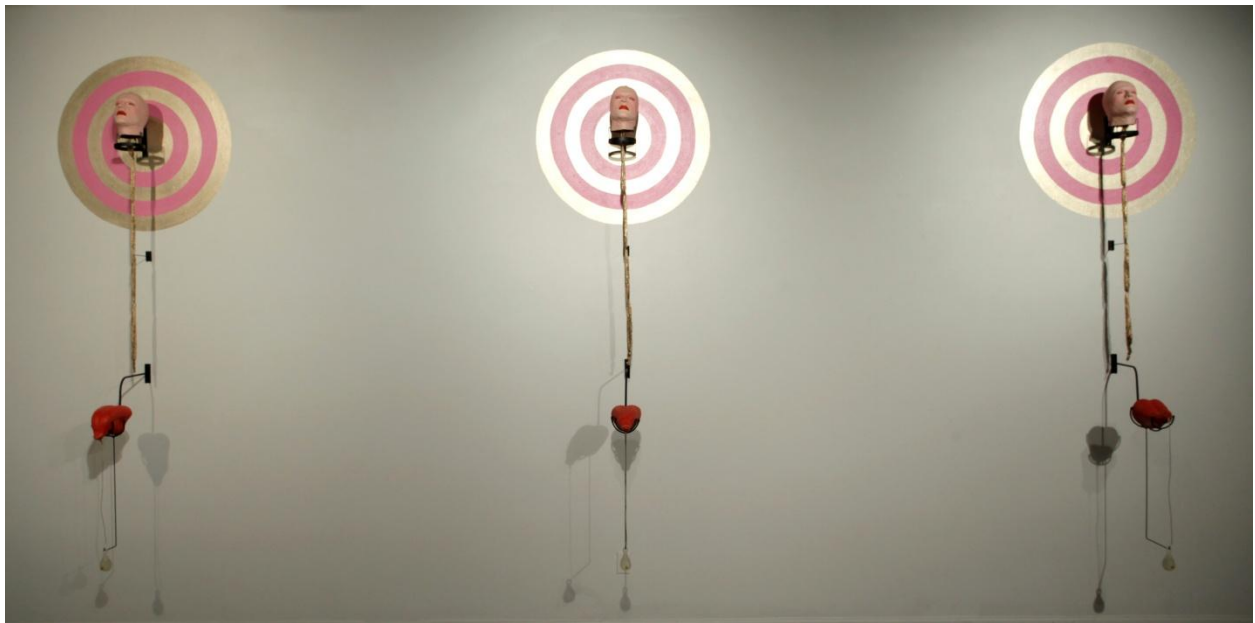


**Tidy Boy Wall Figure**





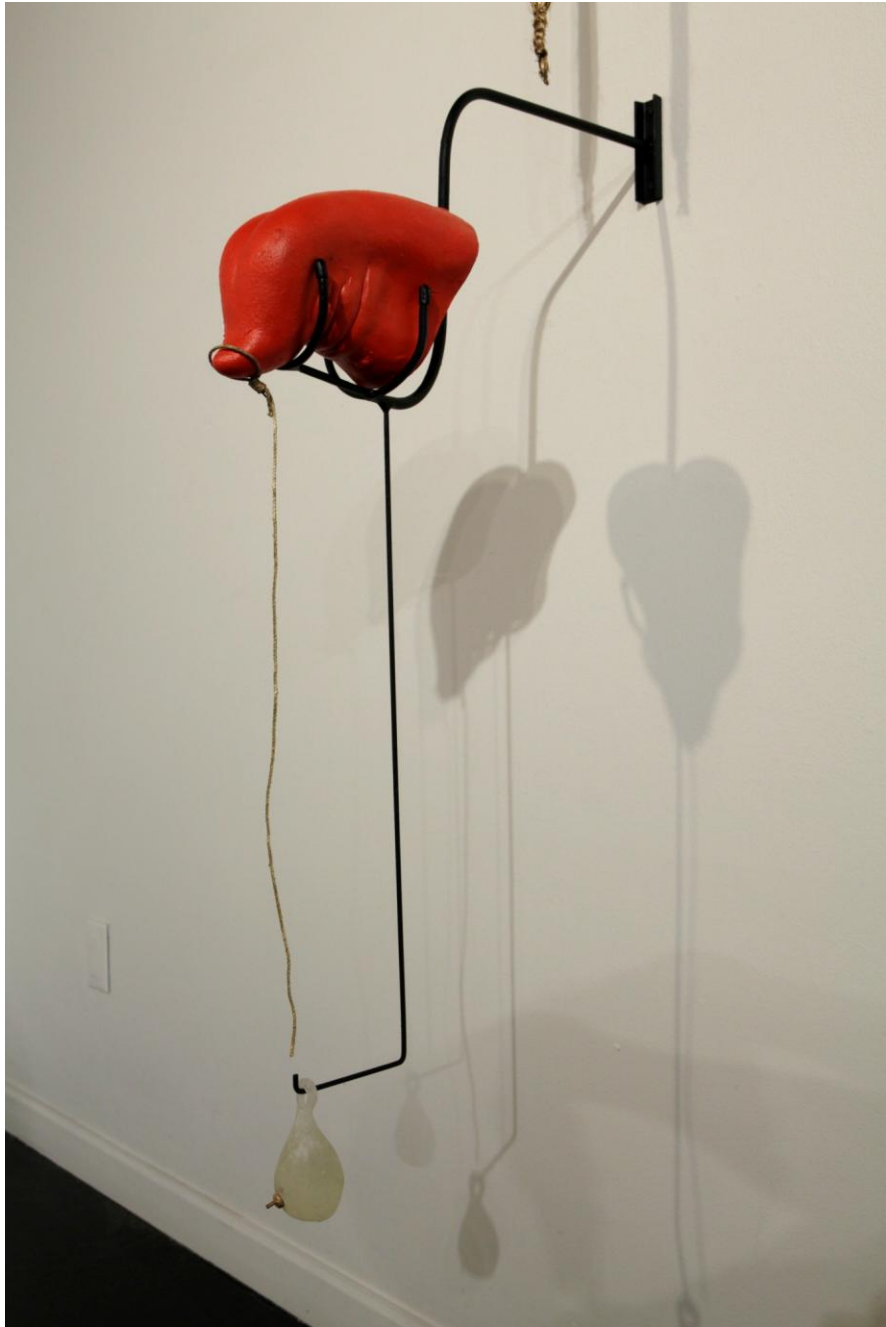
**Tidy Boy with Vacuum Formed Garments**



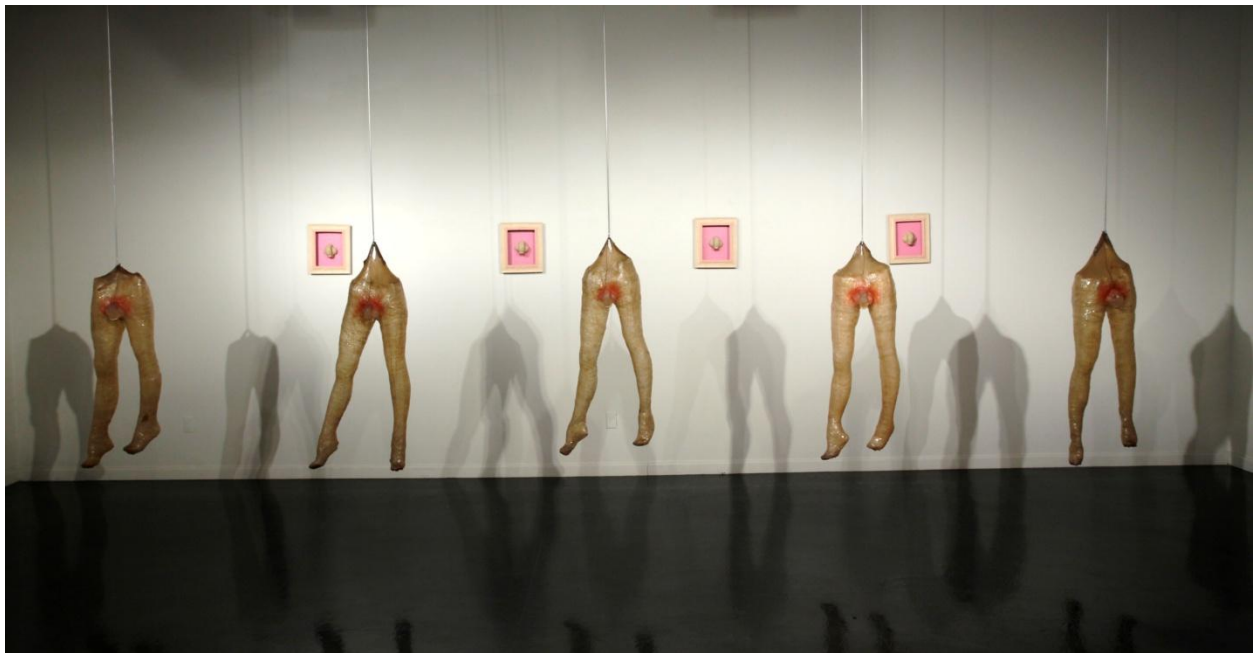
**XY Tryptich**



**XY Tryptich (Side View)**



**Flacid Tongue and Breast (Detail)**



**Whose Hose are Those (Front View)**



**Whose Hose Are Those (side view)**



**Resin Bonded Cast (Detail)**





**Framed Penis (Detail)**





**Full Gallery**

Works Cited

Jameson, Fredric. 1983 "Postmodernism and Consumer Society" in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster, Washington, Bay Press, 1983.